The Librarian's Corner

CHILDREN'S BOOK WEEK.

OUT of all the reasons for enthusiastic approval of Children's Book Week I select but two.

The first is that it will put thousands of good books into the hands of children, one good book in the hands of a child being equal in value to two equally good books in the hands of an adult.

The second is that Children's Book Week provides a meeting ground for all makers, promoters, heralds and billposters of good reading. I mean, of course, the authors, publishers, retailers, librarians, teachers and all who professionally or otherwise stand ready to help the cause.

Library folks, so far from showing any reluctance with regard to a movement which is mainly for the purpose of increasing the private ownership of books, are among its heartiest supporters.

It isn't the socialization of books that interests us, but the socialization of what books have in them.

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It was under Boy Scout auspices that F. K. Mathieus, Chief Scout Librarian, originated the idea, which finds expression next week, but it is now the booksellers themselves who are promoting it. The movement is depending upon public libraries for a good deal of help, as this letter shows:

To the Librarian's Corner, BOOKS AND THE BOOK WORLD—*Sir:* The approach of the National "Children's Book Week," November 10-15, justifies my writing to you asking that you join with me in urging librarians to support this week by holding at this time their usual exhibits of juvenile books suggested for Christmas purchase.

Some librarians, besides holding exhibits in their libraries, are setting up similar displays in their local book stores, and in one instance all the book stores of a certain city have consented to have the children's librarian visit their stores and out of their current stocks in each store select for special display books that the children's librarian can with good conscience recommend that particular store's customers to purchase for their children's Christmas.

This latter plan seems to me to be so splendid that I hope you will say a good word, or even two, in its favor. For too many book stores are filled, some of them to overflowing, with trashy juveniles, in many instances nickel novels masquerading in the dress suit of the bound book. But I am confident, after years of experience, that there is hardly a bookseller anywhere but what upon the basis just proposed would welcome into his store the librarian of his city to help sell the better and best books for children, and so build up a business that will, to his satisfaction, eventually eliminate the trash and plunder, for which he apologizes, saying he sells them because they are cheap in price and because so frequently they are the kind of books called for by his customers. F. K. MATHIEUS,
Chief Scout Librarian, Boy Scouts of America.

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Frederic S. Melcher of the *Publishers' Weekly,* who is always to be found among the top sergeants when developments of practical idealism in matters of print are in need of hard working leadership, is chairman of the committee for Children's Book Week. He writes to the Librarian's Corner to express satisfaction, though not surprise, at the large proportion of librarians who are keenly interested in having books at home.

Mr. Melcher quotes Miss Wood, who is superintendent of school libraries in Minnesota. A child's life is partly in school, partly at home, partly about the streets. Books, says she, should confront the child at all these points

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As an instance of the sort of thing that booksellers are confronted with, I am told that a number of them took armfuls of juveniles from their stock during the war and burned them in the back yard, having discovered a peculiarly vicious sort of German propaganda coiled at the bottom of what was supposed to be merely marketable trash.

Sunday school libraries have been among the sinners in offering rubbish, not always harmless, to youthful readers. It is only fair to say that the Sunday school library's shortcomings have been negligences and ignorances rather than sins. To protect the bookseller against the cheap publisher on the one hand and the ignorant purchaser on the other—that is the main object.

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As for the young reader, the kind I see in summer lying "belly bumper" on the hard turf, just outside the library entrance, slowly waving his bare legs to and fro while his soul communes with Jason, David Balfour or Theodore Roosevelt, it is agreed that no effort on his behalf can be too great.

P. M. P.

"David Blaize" and Memories of "Alice"

WHEN David Blaize woke up and discovered the blue door behind his pillow, crept through and solemnly locked it behind him, he did something that the whole world has been sighing to do for five years. Unlike David, the world perhaps would not have hung the key up where it could be found so easily again. Which is quite enough about the world, for it has nothing whatever to do with this book.

David, at the deeply philosophical age of 6, discovered the world behind the world where things are exactly as they should be. It is to be regretted that Lewis Carroll and reference to *Alice in Wonderland* must be dragged into this review, but promise is made to indulge in no "odious, &c."

When David got through the door he met many old acquaintances and passed through many a startling situation. There were the flamecats who used to dance on the walls in his nursery. But it was when the inmates of the Noah's Ark came to life that the beautiful things began. First there was the call upon Miss Muffet and her spider, and an extremely bored, worn out spider he was. Which was perfectly logical when one considers for how many years he has been frightening Miss Muffet away. Then followed the strange adventures with Uncle Popocatapetl, Uncle was made of gold and the Mint-Man wanted him that he might be moulded into nice, bright, new sovereigns. Uncle's dodges to escape this fate were piteously tragi-comical, but he did get away eventually.

And there was the reception where David had to dance with the giraffe. And the trip to Anywhere that landed him in the hairdresser's when one man was having the map of London painted upon his bald pate ("Brompton Square marked with a red cross, please,") so that he could find his way about, and another pompous gentleman was having *his* head adorned with a realistic cobweb, as he was going to Egypt and wanted to keep the flies off. Then there was the delicious idyl in which David learned to fly like a lark.

Also follow the adventures with the army and David's encounter with the trout when he gets below the roof of glass on the lake.

David wants to learn to swim.

"'Could you spare me the time just to show me the sort of way it goes?' he asked.

"'You' wave yourself,' said the trout; 'and then you go. The sooner you go the better I shall be pleased.'"

David did go—right into the trout's tail. And a sulky trout it was, who explained in a bored way that it was bad manners to hit anybody's tail. David persisted in wanting to learn until the trout told him to get some low, coarse fish to teach him. And then there was——

But it isn't wise to tell everything that happened. It is best to find it out for one's self. As the trout would explain it, you open the book and away you go. Also the sooner you go the quicker will you be immersed in an extraordinarily delicious fairy tale quite out of the common.

As a fantasy, full of humorous whimsicalities, an exquisite bubble compact with unexpected, comical surprises, *David Blaize and the Blue Door* is the best achievement since—but we promised not to allude to him, or rather her, again.

H. S. G.

DAVID BLAISE AND THE BLUE DOOR. By E. F. BENSON. George H. Doran Company.

A NUMBER of the recent stories of Achmed Abdullah, including the volume *The Honorable Gentleman and Others,* are to be published in French and Italian translations.

Mencken Lays About Him

WHEN Mr. H. L. Mencken, the critical bull in the china shop of American letters, slams about him vigorously with an inflated bladder and fondly imagines he is decapitating the Harold Bell Wrights and the Prof. Stuart P. Shermans of this Vale of Woe, he may have our sympathy and good wishes, but he cannot retain our confidence and faith in his prowess. His weapon, which he must believe to be a rapier of destructive power, undoubtedly lands with a loud smack on the current purveyors of literary treacle, but it hardly injures them.

Mr. Mencken's ridicule is so marked, his anathema is so bewilderingly original, that it seems to defeat its own purpose. Many a reader turns to Mencken for a good laugh, and not at all to learn what not to read. Mr. Mencken possesses an amazing critical style. He is vividly satirical; he is comically vulgar when it seems to him the proper course; his wit is often low comedy; he is at his best when he is holding some writer up as a horrible example.

His extremely luscious verbiage often operates against the reader's proper appraisal of his critical powers. Let it be said once and for all that Mr. Mencken is very seldom far from a consistent and laudable understanding of true literary values. He knows a writer when he meets one. He knows style and power and constructive ability. Also is he quickly conscious of the quacks in letters, the snufflers and gurglers in novel writing, the purveyors of what he calls Pishposh. He is after them like a hound on a hot trail, but when he catches up with them his attack is so extravagant that the subject is lost in the fun of the matter presenting it.

The essays collected under the title *Prejudices: First Series,* read quite as well as they did in the pages of the Mencken-Nathan magazine. Their range is wide. Perhaps the chief value these pieces possess lies in a certain comprehensive valuation and a relentless application of the highest tests for what constitutes literature. One may readily realize that Mr. Mencken has thoroughly absorbed the work of the men and women he writes about, is always familiar with the milieu. He knows where to place them and he has no false modesty.

No extenuating circumstances are allowed to sway his judgment. A thing is either good or bad. There are a number of faults that he particularly likes to flay in writers. Pecksniffery, the comstockian viewpoint, is the chief of them. He laments time and again the serious and lasting injuries done American letters by the old Puritanic and conservative laws of morality. With brutal plainness he shouts at the top of his voice, "A mongrel and inferior people, incapable of any spiritual aspiration above that of second rate English colonials, we seek refuge inevitably in the one sort of superiority that the lower castes of men can authentically boast—to wit, superiority in docility, in credulity, in resignation, in morals. We are the most moral race in the world; there is not another that we do not look down upon in that department; our confessed aim and destiny as a nation is to inoculate them all with our incomparable rectitude. In the last analysis all ideas are judged among us by moral standards; moral values are our only permanent tests of worth, whether in the arts, in politics, in philosophy or in life itself."

The modicum of truth that this indictment contains makes the reviewer chary of attacking it, but it illustrates the fault of Mr. Mencken: his pen runs away with him. Then, too, broad buffoonery creeps into his ridicule at times; his voice gets unpleasantly shrill, and the jangled nerves of the reader respond with a perplexed antagonism.

In spite of which Mr. Mencken is intensely amusing. One has but to read the attacks on Thorstein Veblen, Mary MacLane and Will Levington Comfort. They are overdone and laughable but beneath the bladderthumping is real critical perception. And in such pieces as the essay on Arnold Bennett, the piece called *The Genealogy of Etiquette* and the shaving of Shaw called *The Ulster Polonius* are more restrained critical valuations that are quite as authoritative and well argued as any being written to-day.

H. S. G.

PREJUDICES: FIRST SERIES. By H. L. MENCKEN. Alfred A. Knopf.

Elsie Janis Over There

HENCEFORTH if Elsie Janis ever complains of a dressing room or an extra matinee or of indisposition her managers would do well to have at hand a copy of her book, *The Big Show,* in which she gives an account of her six months' concert tour abroad for the American soldiers. "I like to go through mud, climb things, &c.," she says. She enters in her diary: "Rather a quiet day. Only four shows." When a French throat specialist, "who examined my voice box," has said she mustn't sing for a week, she writes: "I thoroughly agreed with him and went on to Besançon, where I gave two shows for about 5,000 men." There was no time for indisposition. It was Miss Janis's job, as she understood it, to be "merry and bright," and if you have any doubts about it look at the pictures not only of herself but of the "regular guys."

A good time seems to have been had by all those present; and among them were many and many thousands, including the "Boss General," who called her Elsie and laughed so much she felt as if she would like to keep on singing and doing her tricks the whole night long. And if any one feels inclined to make light of this book and of Elsie's part in the Big Show perhaps it is not sacrilege to remind that person of the Juggler of Notre Dame. Anyway, Miss Janis had a perfectly splendid time. If the boys went wild, as she says, they "had nothing on me."

N. P. D.

THE BIG SHOW. By ELSIE JANIS. Cosmopolitan Book Corporation.